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THE THREE PATHS

ANNIE BESANT

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THE THREE PATHS
TO UNION WITH GOD

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THE THREE PATHS
TO UNION WITH GOD

LECTURES DELIVERED AT BENARES, AT THE SIXTH ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE INDIAN SECTION OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY, OCTOBER 19TH, 20TH AND 21ST, 1896

BY

ANNIE BESANT

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FOREWORD

On the occasion of the Sixth Annual Convention of the Indian Section of the Theosophical Society I was asked to deliver three lectures and to take the *Bhagavad Gîtâ* as subject. Feeling quite incompetent to lecture on that divine book, I took the humbler topic of the Three Paths of Karma, Jñâna and Bhakti, as explained in the *Bhagavad Gîtâ*, and the lectures delivered are now issued in book form.

I am indebted to Babu Sirish Chandra Bose, Munsif, of Benares, for the wonderfully accurate report which he most kindly took of the discourses; I have been reported by the best London men, but have never sent a report to the press with less correction than that supplied by my amateur friend.

ANNIE BESANT.

Benares,
February 1, 1897.

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KARMA MÂRGA

THREE Paths have been traced by the Sages along any one of which a man may tread, and, by following, may attain liberation. Three are the Paths, and yet in a sense they are but one. Differing in their methods, their end is one and the same. Differing in the external conditions, they all lead to the one Self, they all seek the same goal. These three Paths—the three Mârgas as they are called in the Indian Philosophy—that of Karma or action, that of Jñâna or Wisdom, that of Bhakti or Devotion —these three Paths finally blend into one, each of them acquiring in the end the qualities of the others, each of them passing as it were into the other two, blending into one the characteristics of the three. For when you reach Yoga, whether it be the Karma Yoga, or whether it be the Jñâna Yoga, or whether it be the Bhakti Yoga, the end is one—Union with the Self; the attributes needed resemble each other, and the man reaching perfection through one is

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wanting in none of the qualities which have been developed along any of the three Paths.

These three Paths, in the difference of their methods, and in the identity of their aim, have been explained for us in that most beautiful and most widely spread of Indian Scriptures, the Song of the Lord, the Discourse of Shrî Krishna—the *Bhagavad Gîtâ*. There it is that the Paths are explained and there it is that their end is declared. There we learn how in the heart of the man of perfect devotion wisdom springs up; there we learn how action may be wrought without attachment, without binding a man to rebirth; and there we learn also that along any one of these Paths the Lord will meet with man, the Supreme will bless him. Let men travel along one or the other, they seek the one Self whether by action, or by wisdom, or by devotion; and those who seek shall surely, shall inevitably, find Him; for the Self of all is One, and the goal of all the three Paths is the same.

If we turn our glance over Nature, if we look over the whole of the world, everywhere we find things seeking the Self; everywhere in every direction, under whatever form and whatever name, whether wisely or blindly, whether clear-sightedly or gropingly, all seek the Self, all are striving to find the Self. The sun as it darts its rays through

space is seeking the Self; the vast ocean when it surges into waves is but seeking the Self; the winds as they wander over the surface of the earth are seeking the Self; the forest trees as they stretch their arms outwards are seeking the Self; every animal, however dimly, is groping after the Self; mankind, however blindly, however foolishly, however mistakenly, is searching for the Self. This tendency in all creation, this universal fact in every form of life, in ancient times was called the seeking of the Self. Modern science notices the same tendency in Nature, and names it Evolution. So to whichever side we turn, ancient or modern, we find this upward, this inward, aspiration.

Why should all things seek the Self? Why should the Self be the goal of all endeavours? Is it not because the Self dwells alike in the hearts of all? Whether it be in the ocean, whether it be in a mineral or in a tree, whether in an animal or in a man, the Self there is hidden within, concealed by the outer covering of illusion. The one Self is seated alike in the sun and in the cavity of the heart, and every living creature searching after happiness is but seeking the Self; for searching, however mistakenly, after happiness is but the blind groping after the Self, which is Bliss. Yea, the Self is Bliss, eternal, unending, undying; and what we call happiness is the Self, which is Bliss,

reflected in broken beams through the medium which surrounds us. Let none mistake, let none be blinded by the divergences of seeking, by the errors caused by the outer illusions; for all are really seeking in the outer form the inner life. They seek it everywhere, in all their blind efforts after joy; and it was the Self Incarnate Shrî Krishna who said: "Who sees seated equally in all beings, the supreme Îshvara, he seeth."[1]

The Paths that we are to trace in these afternoon meetings are the three great Paths along which consciously or unconsciously the Self is sought. In the earlier stages, the seeking is unconscious seeking, the blind desire for happiness, for satisfaction and joy. In the later stages, the seeking becomes conscious, an intelligent understanding of what is sought, and of the methods of the search. Whether in blindness or in vision, the search is being carried on, and according to the stage of the evolution of the soul is its knowledge of the methods and its knowledge of its final goal. These Paths as they are followed raise the man above the illusion caused by the qualities of Nature, those qualities known to us in their widest sense as the three guṇas. It is these that blind the souls, that veil the Self, that bring in the character of illusion and prevent the recognition of the reality. On

[1] *Bhagavad Gîtâ*, xiii. 27.

the Paths men learn, by utilising these very guṇas, to rise beyond them, using different methods, of activity, of wisdom and of devotion, in order to learn to separate the Self from the outer activities, to learn to discriminate the Self from the senses and the mind which move after their appropriate objects, to pass above and beyond the guṇas; and then, above and beyond the guṇas, they find the unveiled Self.

The Path that is our special object of study this afternoon is Karma Mârga, the Path of Action, which is blindly and quite unconsciously followed by the mass of mankind, not knowing either the method or the object. We shall find, as we look into the history of our race, that this Karma Mârga leads man to plunge into action of every kind, to rush out after objects of every description, to go restlessly seeking satisfaction by way of the external universe, always trying to get more and more and more, always to accumulate more and more, largely, and chiefly by increasing activity, by greater energy of motion, by increased concentration of effort, by incessant action, to find the Self. He plunges into action, saying, "I do, I feel, I experience, I have pleasure and pain." He knows not that all these doings, feelings, experiences of pleasure and pain, belong to the energies of Nature, and that the true Self is not doing, nor feeling, nor

acting, and that these energies of Nature are following one eternal ceaseless round. At first he is moved to action by desire for its fruit. He desires to enjoy. If he lies down doing nothing, without activity, he will feel no enjoyment, he will constantly suffer; the body itself would perish were utter inactivity to supervene. Tamas has first to be overcome; the quality in Nature of darkness, sluggishness, inertia, sloth, has to be mastered, controlled, and brought into entire subjection. Look at the mass of mankind and see how little at present they are susceptible to higher impulses. It would be useless to appeal to their desire for knowledge, for they have no such longing. They cannot appreciate the delights of intellectual struggle, still less can they answer to the stimulus of spiritual aspiration. They are sunk in the darkness of the tâmasic guṇa, are wrapped in ignorance and in darkness, and desire to remain undisturbed. How shall they be stirred into activity? Better activity of any kind than no activity at all; better misdirected energy than absolute inertia—the absence of all motion. They must be moved. At first the grossest and the coarsest animal desires are the spurs of Nature; the sting, as it were, of Nature's whip, driving the sluggish beings into exertion, and scourging them forth on the path of action. Man must be moved by desires, by something to which

his nature responds. Later on these desires will be recognised as degrading, as unworthy of humanity, as dragging him back on the Path, as stifling higher possibilities. But in the earlier stages they are necessary for the growth of man, for his progress out of this tâmasic quality which enwraps him, which prevents him from moving at all. They are better than death; low as they are, they have more promise in them than absolute stagnation. So the activity which is born of desire, which stirs the man to action, which makes him seek gratification, which sends him after pleasure even though the pleasure be low, is the early teaching of Nature which drives him into activity, in order that he may grow. However much, then, these evils are to be reprobated, they have their place, their function for the lowest and most stagnant natures. And therefore the Lord has said that He is present even in the vices of the vicious, in that which is driving them into action in order that some activity may be obtained.

Treading the Path of Karma, the man later on is moved by a desire for a somewhat higher fruit, and that develops in him the quality of Rajas. He becomes exceedingly active; he rushes out in every direction. His energies are abundant, overwhelming, aggressive, and combative. He flies into the outer world, driven by the activities of the senses

and the mind, and seeking their gratification. He performs action with this desire for fruit.

Now the fruit may be of two kinds. He desires to enjoy the result of his action, whether it may be in this world, or whether it may happen to be in another. If we glance back to ages which are known to be less material, if we look backward to the times when religion was exercising a predominant influence over mankind, when man recognised the immortality of the soul, not as a phrase of the lips but as the ruling idea of the life, when the man felt and knew that he himself was immortal, then the action was motived by the desire for fruit to be enjoyed in the realms of Svarga. The man's activities might be râjasic, working entirely for fruit, giving up a thing here that he might gain much more elsewhere; sacrificing some of his wealth in charity in order that he might have goods on the other side of death; laying up happiness in the superphysical realm, that in Svarga he might enjoy the fruit: yet in those ages, though the action was largely guided by the motive or desire for fruit, the fruit was to be enjoyed in the realms on the other side of death, instead of being limited to the material delights of the earth.

But if we turn to the activities around us at the present time, to the Path as it is being trodden so very largely in the West, and to an increasing extent

in the East, we shall find that the fruit of action that men are desiring, the fruit which is the motive of their exertion and the object of their labour, that fruit is to be something on this side of death, and consists very largely in the increase of material objects, in the acquirement and the possession of material wealth. Let us look now for a moment at the western nations. We find them continually engaged in the effort to increase their comforts. I may call it, in fact, a diseased activity. No man is thought to be doing anything unless there is a result produced on the physical material plane. The activity is not recognised unless it brings fruit in the physical, in the outer or lower material world. You find men very often following science. While the desire on the part of the scientific discoverer may be the desire for knowledge pure and simple, the interest of the public in his discovery, the eagerness with which they watch his progress, the great anxiety with which they take up his results, is because the increase of knowledge leads to increased power for the accumulation of objects, to increased gratification of material desires, to increased abundance of material wealth. We find endless multiplication of objects. There is a race between the objects that gratify desires and the creation of new desires which will demand fresh objects for their gratification. There is a

constant struggle between the wearied men of the world, of wealth and of pleasure, who are longing for new sensations, for new activities, for new channels into which all their energies may pour, and those who supply their desires, who try to invent new objects in order to stimulate fresh desires and thus obtain fresh avenues of employment for themselves. Thus always men want to have more and more pleasures of the same kind. Men have learned to travel faster; journeys that used to take formerly the greater part perhaps of a year are now accomplished in a month or so, and journeys of months are accomplished in weeks or even in days. But is man very much the happier, and has his desire been satisfied? No. His cry to the man of science still is: "Find us a new motive power, something that will transcend the possibilities of steam, something like electricity if you will, which will enable us to cross continents and oceans in a couple of days, and fly over the surface of earth with greater rapidity. Steam we are tired of; find electricity, or find some new motor that will carry us more swiftly."

How much is man really the happier for this swifter movement? How much would he be the higher in spiritual progress if he could do in a day what before he took a year to do? More and more speed, bigger and bigger vessels, and thus men go

on in an unending succession. Lately they were boasting in the papers in Paris that a new man will come into existence on a new earth, because they hope to create food by chemical processes instead of by agricultural methods, because they are getting more knowledge, accumulating greater stores of wealth. That pursuit is doomed to failure. That restless seeking for satisfaction in mere increase of activity has no ending. More and more may be gained; more and more may be accumulated; and in the midst of it all, man will remain weary and discontented; because in none of these is the Self to be found unveiled; and the soul of man, identical in nature with the Self, is ever weary until it finds its home in Him. Therefore it is that along that particular line of Karma no ultimate satisfaction can be gained. A man toils all his life for wealth, but he is discontented, and in the midst of all his possessions the cry is for something more. Truly was it said by Manu that we might as well try to extinguish a fire by pouring butter into it, as to extinguish desire by gratifying it with the objects of desire. Such gratification ends in weariness; such gratification ends in satiety; and the Self, which is greater than all objects of desire, will sting the Soul still onward to seek a deeper satisfaction.

After a time the man on the Path of Karma

discovers this. He finds he is weary, dissatisfied, and discontented: that the more he acquires, the more causes of discontentment arise around him, and deep and bitter is his disappointment. Then reaction comes. He sees that here there is no satisfaction, no gratification. He says: Let me fly from the world, let me renounce all objects of the senses, for here on the Path of Karma there is neither peace nor contentment to be found; and out of sheer disgust the man will for a time rush away from all the objects of the senses, and seek to find peace in the solitude of recluse life. But to his disappointment, to his discouragement, to his grief, he discovers that not by fleeing from the objects of desire can desire itself be extinguished. He finds that the taste for them pursues him even into the jungle. The images of the sense-objects come after him to his cave and hermitage, and the man dwells mentally upon such images of the senses; although the body is held back, the man is still a prey to desires, he is still torn by the contending passions of his lower nature. For desire is not extinguished by external withdrawal from the objects of desire. Its roots are deeper in human nature; and the Path of Karma must be further trodden if desire is to disappear.

Then there comes to him the voice of the Lord in the silence of this inactivity that he has forced

upon himself. The Voice will come through the silence, and it speaks the words of eternal wisdom: "Man winneth not freedom from action by abstaining from activity, nor by mere renunciation (of activity) doth he rise to perfection."[1] Not with outer inactivity, but with freedom from desire is this Path of Karma to be trodden. Freedom from action will not be won by the bodily abstention from activity. The Path of Action must yet be trodden before the soul may be free. The freedom is won on that Path itself by learning a deeper lesson than the removal of the body from the city to the jungle. He learns that lesson from the same Divine source, the duty of the man living in the world who yet would be free from attachment. He learns that he must act, but that the motive must be changed. He must tread the Path of Action, but the motive is to be new and divine in its character. And that same Voice, the same great Teacher, breathes once more its lesson into the soul of the weary and exhausted seeker for freedom: "As the ignorant act from attachment to action, O Bharata, so the wise act without attachment, desiring the maintenance of mankind."[2]

Here is a change, indeed. Not to rush away into outer inactivity, deserting the place which his

[1] *Bhagavad Gîtâ*, iii. 4. [2] *Bhagavad Gîtâ*, iii. 25.

KARMA MÂRGA

Karma had marked out in the world; not to desert the duty to his family or to his nation; but to bring into the discharge of those duties a new spirit, carrying on his action inspired by a new motive. His place may be that of a man whose duty it is to acquire wealth. Let him acquire it; but where the ignorant would acquire wealth in order to enjoy the fruit, let him work without attachment; let the wealth flow into his hands, but let him take it as a steward for the world, and not as its possessor. He works for the benefit of mankind, and not from attachment to action. Such a man will turn his wealth into new lines of active work for man. He will plan magnificent schemes; he will think and work and toil for the benefit of man: as others work and toil for the benefit of their own personal selves and their immediate family, he will work for others, and thus use his powers for the benefit of mankind.

Here a subtler temptation attacks him. This work for the maintenance of mankind even may have a personal object running through it, and may start from a subtler root of actions, may have a different kind of looking for result. For a man who plans out great schemes of benevolence is anxious that the schemes should succeed. He wants success, and part of his motive is this longing for success and for the gratification of seeing the

fruits of his labours. Or perhaps it may be that he desires the love and gratitude of his fellowmen and to gain their approbation. Thus a personal return for his action may be sought. But that must not be. If any personal motive comes in he is bound by the fruit of his action; he is fettered by the desired result.

And so the same Lord who before had taught him, the same Divine Teacher who had made him understand that freedom from outer activity was not freedom from action, that the wise man must act for the sake of serving mankind, now gives him a deeper lesson, now carries him on to a still further step on the Path—it is the grand lesson of renouncing every fruit of action, the loving, joyful surrender of every motive which has its roots in the personal Self. The lesson comes in those words of the Lord: "Thy business is with the action only, never with its fruits," even though the fruits be the love and gratitude that give delight to the lower man. "Never with its fruits"; that must not mingle with the motive. And then the Teacher goes on to say: "Let not the fruit of action be thy motive, nor be thou to inaction attached."[1]

Perfect renunciation. No longer moved by personal desire to enjoy the fruit here; no longer by the personal desire to enjoy the fruit on the

[1] *Bhagavad Gîtâ*, ii. 47.

other side of death; no longer by the higher personal desire to reap the love and gratitude of his fellowmen; but the renunciation of all desires, the doing of action with no regard to the fruit. Let success come; what is it to the doer? Let failure come; what matters it to him who has done his work? "Balanced even in success and failure: equilibrium is called Yoga."[1] Equal in success and failure, in pleasure and pain, honour and dishonour, in love and in hatred. No motive that touches the lower Self is mingled with the activity. The action is the work of the Lord, and whatever the result, it accrues to the Lord. Plan and scheme for the benefit of man, and your scheme fails. It is well. Plan and scheme for the benefit of man, and your scheme succeeds. It is well. Success was not the object; failure was not the object. The only object was the performance of duty. Whatever the fruit of the action, the man remains untouched and undisturbed. Action is his duty. This is the true treading of the Path of Karma—not seeking action when it is not present, nor refusing to perform it when it is there. Willing to work, if work be duty; willing to be inactive, if no work comes within the duty of the moment—absolute indifference to every result. The man who is thus treading the Path of Karma may be

[1] *Bhagavad Gîtâ*, ii. 48.

living in a palace, may be fed with the most delicate and savoury dishes, all around him may lie objects of gratification to the senses; he remains unaffected. Let them come, let them go, "the senses move among the objects of sense,"[1] I remain untouched and undisturbed. They give him no gratification; they give him no repulsion. He neither repulses objects when they are present, nor desires them when they are absent. He is hurled from a palace to a hovel; instead of rich clothes he is clad in rags; instead of savoury dishes, he has to live on broken food that may be given him by the poor,—what matters it to him? He desired not what has passed away, any more than he rejected it when it was present. He is as happy in the hovel as in the palace; as happy in the palace as in the hovel. Neither attracts him, neither repels him. They are outer energies of Nature, passing illusion of Matter. What are they to him who has attained renunciation, and cares nothing for fruit, but only for the doing of duty? A sublime life, a noble life, one of the hardest of all lives to live—to live surrounded by every object and absolutely indifferent to all. To move through riches or poverty, through pleasure or pain, through honour or ignominy, with equal contentment, with equal serenity, and with equal calm. To what a height has such a man

[1] *Bhagavad Gîtâ*, v. 9.

risen as he treads the difficult Path of Karma, now become the Path of Karma-Yoga! He is approaching the stage of Yoga where all paths blend into one, and where the Supreme will unveil Himself to the man who is free from the illusions of matter.

Out of this life—the life that asks nothing, that seeks nothing, that claims nothing, that refuses nothing, out of that life wisdom arises. How can the eyes remain without discrimination of him who has learned to discriminate between the outer activities and the Self by the renunciation of desire while performing the action? Such a man becomes wise by action as another may become wise by intellectual study and contemplation. But there is another Path—the Path of Bhakti—and that must blend with both the others when the journey is complete.

Then a glimpse of the Supreme is gained. The eyes, purged of all desires, perceive Him under all veils of matter. The heart, purified from all desires, sees deep within itself the one Self of all. Then from that sight of the Supreme, from that glimpse of the eternal Beauty, the last touch is put to Karma-Yoga, the last step is taken on the karmic path, and that is the lesson of sacrifice. It still comes from the same Teacher, and is poured out from the same Divine lips; once more to the soul that is purified, that has learned the lesson

of activity as duty, the lesson of renunciation of fruit, and that is working out the law, comes the final, the supreme, lesson:—"The world is bound by all action unless performed with sacrifice for object."[1] Every action now is to be done not only without desire for his fruit, but with the object of sacrifice to the Supreme. Man has to become a co-worker with the Lord, a fellow-worker with the Deity Himself. Once he did action with fruit as motive. Then he learned to do it for mankind. Then he learned to do it for duty's sake, renouncing every fruit, in taking every thing as the same. Lastly, he learns to do it with sacrifice as object, and every action becomes an act of worship, every action is an act of homage to the Supreme. Then indeed on the Path of Karma he tastes the joy of the Lord; then there begins to flow into him the bliss of the Self. He learns to renounce and to stand without attachment to the lower, and the higher flows in and fills his being and he knows himself as one with the Supreme. The deepest joy suffuses the whole of his nature; work is done as sacrifice, and the joy of the sacrificer is his. He shares in the life of Íshvara; he is a channel for the working of the Lord; he sees all action done as sacrifice to Him—He the only Worker, the one Sacrifice. He the Giver, and He the

[1] *Bhagavad Gîtâ*, iii. 9.

Taker of the fruit and the Enjoyer, the whole bound up in Him. And when that perfect sacrifice is accomplished, when the life gives always and takes from none save God, when the light flows out through it, but it asks nothing for itself, when the sun shines on the uttermost limits of the world and cares nothing for its own radiance and claims nothing save to belong to the Lord—then the Path of Karma passes into the Supreme Peace. Then man has found his goal; he reaches union with the Self.

So may we close with the teaching and the promise of the same Divine Instructor, whose precepts we have been striving to understand, and to apply to our own lives the teaching and the promise embodied in the mighty words: "The disciplined Self, moving among sense-objects with senses free from attraction and repulsion, mastered by the Self, goeth to Peace. . . . This is the Brahman state, O son of Prithâ. Having attained thereto none is bewildered. Who, even at the death-hour, is established therein he goeth to the Nirvâna of Brahman."[1]

[1] *Bhagavad Gîtâ*, ii. 64, 72.

JÑÂNA MÂRGA

We were considering yesterday the way in which the Self might be sought by way of activity. We were studying that Path of Action which so many of mankind must tread. Studying that Path, we learned how a man might gradually grow from attachment to non-attachment, how he might practise renunciation, how finally by sacrifice he might attain to the Supreme. This afternoon we are to consider the second of the great Paths leading to the Self, that which is called the Jñâna Mârga or the Path of Wisdom,—a Path trodden by the minority only, a Path which is not suited to the mass of mankind, a Path which is encumbered with special dangers, most particularly for the untrained, for those who have not accomplished the preliminary steps of purification. For neither about the Path of Karma, nor about the Path of Bhakti, is there the same danger of misunderstanding, the same likelihood of confusion, the same

possibility of going utterly wrong, if due preparation for its higher stages has not been properly made as there is in connection with Jñâna Mârga. We are to trace it from its early stages to its later growth. We are to see how it leads from the life of the world to the goal of the Supreme. We shall take it stage by stage, in order that we may understand it, in order that we may avoid misconception, and may not fall into those traps which are on either side of it, and which ensnare so many unwary pilgrims.

I have said that the entrance to it is only possible to some. The way which begins in pure intellect, although it transcends pure intellect in its later stages, implies the development in the man who would tread it at all, of a wide, of a large, of a penetrating and a lofty intellect. The senses must be subjugated, the mind must be cultivated, —and cultivated not with a view of obtaining anything by its exercise save the pure enjoyment of pure wisdom at a later time; it must not be tainted by desire for anything that may come as the result of knowledge, connected with the gratification of the lower nature of man. As we saw yesterday, intellect is often used to subserve the gratification of the senses. Science is often employed in order to increase the accumulation of material objects, in order to increase the comforts

of the physical world. The man who is preparing to tread the Path of Wisdom must have outgrown all those lower desires, must have turned aside from the attraction of the senses, and must find, at first in knowledge and later in wisdom, the reward which is all-sufficient in itself, and which needs no adventitious advantages in order to be attractive to the inner man. Tamas must be entirely subjugated, must no longer have power to influence his nature, no longer have power to hold the feet of the man in the mire belonging to the lowest world. Rajas, the quality of activity, must be turned away from all those lines of action that have to do with material objects. Rajas must be turned in the direction of gaining knowledge; all its energies must be concentrated on the accumulation of knowledge, before the Path of true Wisdom can be approached at all.

In the earlier stages of the Path, what we may call the entrance stage, knowledge will be sought for its own sake. You may pick out the souls that have entered on this Path by watching how a man will gradually develop within himself, or be born with, the tendency innate in the Ego to search for knowledge, asking for nothing save the delight of discovery, save the joy of a wide intellect, of the conscious increase of powers of the mind. You will find such men scattered over the

world, though few and far between,—men who care nothing for fame, nothing for wealth, who are not seeking the applause of their fellows, nor the gratification of their lower nature. They are devotees of knowledge for the joy that knowledge gives. They find in its pursuit its own reward. They are passionate in their search after knowledge up to death. They long to know the nature of the universe, the nature of man, to plunge into the heights and depths of existence, to fathom all the secrets of Nature, to assimilate all the knowledge which the outer world can give. Knowledge, as I said, is not wisdom. Knowledge lies in the observation of facts, the observation of phenomena, in gathering those observations together, in arranging them side by side and tracing out the relation between them, in searching for some underlying principle which may group and classify and co-ordinate these separately observed phenomena, and then in welding them together into some hypothesis which fits them all, will explain them all. Then the student takes the hypothesis based upon observation and upon reasoning by inference from the results of observation; and comparing that hypothesis anew with the phenomena of the outer world, he devises experiments to test it, seeking for all possible methods by which its accuracy or inaccuracy may

be discovered; and thus having completed his experiments he can say: "I have experimented, and found an invariable result, which was foretold by the hypothesis." Then the result is regarded as a Law in Nature, on which men may build with certainty. A man of science will work in this fashion, doing admirable work of its own kind, watching carefully, observing with endless patience, showing what has been described as "the sublime patience of the investigator," and asking Nature questions time after time, month after month, year after year, until her answer is ever repeated with undeviating identity, so that he may build on a rock of truth on which Science may securely stand and advance to fresh discoveries. If you would understand the way in which knowledge is thus gained, take as an example Charles Darwin, the great English naturalist, whose marvellous experiments were the admiration of his own generation as well as of those that follow. You will find him, for instance, devoting himself to the cultivation of certain plants, changing the soil, regulating the light, observing all the conditions that surrounded them, giving to one more, to another less, varying the conditions in every possible way, and noting down the results of each variation. Then perhaps repeating the observations a hundred times over. Doing this, that no

inaccuracy might creep in, that no hasty inference might be made, that no partial view should be taken as the whole, that no blunder should be made in tracing the thread of causation, and that mere succession of phenomena should not mislead the inquirer into a mistaken view of a sequence which was never changed. This is admirable in its devotion to truth, in its candour, determining to give endless labour before an assertion is made. All this is real worship of that God of truth whose hand is shown in the laws of the physical world. And this very patience is the proof of the real and unadulterated desire for knowledge which animates the man. To such a worker nothing in Nature is small and nothing is great. Every phenomenon is observed with the same patient accuracy, whether it be the course of suns or the movement of small microscopic creatures in a drop of water. Who can tell where knowledge may be hidden? Who can say where the finger of Nature is pointing to a new discovery? It may be that the movements of a particle, observed under the microscope, may be more significant of the Divine working in Nature than the course of a comet in its orbit as it whirls through space and plunges into the infinite depths. Nothing is either small or great; everything is the manifestation of Nature, and may hide the secret of the working. He learns

as he studies that Nature works as carefully, as exquisitely, as delicately, with the same geometrical accuracy and precision of form, when she fashions the shell of an invisible diatom, as when she makes a solar system of planets revolving round their central sun. And this view of Nature —that all in Nature is equally worthy of observation—is interwoven into the very life of the man who gives himself to knowledge, and follows her to her obscurest corners. Shall I tell you a curious fable which presents this truth in a forcible way by a striking picture, which really expresses, as well as anything I have ever read, this characteristic of the searcher after knowledge which is marked in the earlier stages of this Path?

A great Russian writer of fiction, that some of you may have read, Tourguenieff, gives the following fable to illustrate the way in which Nature works over her minutest products as over her greatest and grandest creations. He says that he travelled through a mighty rock-hewn temple, a vast temple whose limits were invisible, lost in obscurity on either side, so vast that only the darkness seemed to bound it, and the living rock was above it and below it, and the living rock made its pillars and the arches of its gigantic roof. As he went through that wonderful temple, he saw sitting in it a mighty Goddess, gigantic in her figure, magnificent in her

form, her face radiant with divine power, love, and intellect. Strength and wisdom were incarnate in this heroic figure, seated lonely amid the immensity of the rock-hewn fane. She was engaged at work, —bending over her task in intensest contemplation, her fingers busily employed in shaping some object, in producing some creature. Her mighty brows were bent above it in rapt attention; all her thought was given to her labour. Silence was around her, silence on every side. He approached in fear and thought, "Surely this Goddess is fashioning the brain of some mighty hero or of some great thinker; some great one of mankind is occupying her attention, and all her powers are bent to the gigantic work." He approached in reverence, and asked her what she wrought. She raised her face and said—and her deep, soft voice reverberated through the space around her—"I fashion the hind-leg of a flea."

Such is the fable. The meaning is clear enough: In it is depicted the spirit that votaries of knowledge learn when they meet the mighty Goddess, that for Her everything is worthy of perfection. The smallest and the greatest, the tiniest and the mightiest alike, have got in them something of the Nature-Spirit, and students search into the secrets of Nature with eager and reverent minds, and thus knowledge increases, and science after science is builded.

The microscope unfolds the infinite world of the minute, and the telescope unveils the infinite world of the vast. Above and below, in all the six directions of space, new fields stretch out for ever new discoveries. New knowledge beckons the student from every side. World after world is there to be studied in our solar system; world after world to be conquered. Let us suppose that a man is equipped, as a man may be, to study all the regions of solar space, that he is held by no limits of physical existence. Let the man who seeks Knowledge pass from the physical to the astral world, invisible to fleshly eyes to-day. He has to acquire there the knowledge of a variety of objects, of a diversity of phenomena and of new possibilities. As the intellect evolves new capacities, new depths of being unfold before the dazzled eyes. He conquers the astral, other worlds unfold before him, the world of intellect,—a new infinity of things to be observed, a new infinity and diversity of experiences to be gained. Let us say that he has conquered the physical, astral, and mental regions. He has only conquered the three worlds of this tiny sphere; and the rest of the infinite universe stretches around him, unknown, unexplored. Suppose that he conquers planet after planet until every one of them is as familiar to him with its wide field of phenomena as our city is to ourselves.

Imagine that after the conquest of this solar system he starts to conquer other systems through all the infinity of space. Where shall knowledge find its terminus? Where shall the intellect acknowledge itself exhausted? Knowledge piled on knowledge, worlds heaped over worlds, systems massed upon systems, and still the unknown stretches around him on every side, and still the unexplored beckons him to its mysterious distances, and the longing for knowledge spurs on the lagging soul. There is a story of the pillar of fire in which Mahâdeva stretched upwards and downwards, lost in the infinities of space; and Brahmâ soared upwards a thousand years and found that it still towered beyond Him, and Vishnu plunged downwards for a thousand years, and the fire still stretched below Him. That might be taken as the picture of the Infinite Divine Being who manifests Himself in all the worlds and in all whose worlds only a fraction of His possibilities are shown. There is no end to Aparâ Vidyâ, to the knowledge of phenomena; there is no end to seeking. The soul's pinions flag in the unceasing depths of space, and wearied out the mind falls back defeated, baffled, unable to complete its knowledge.

But during the search for knowledge, during the gathering of observations, the Self has been speaking to the heart of man. The Self has been

whispering that It is hidden beneath the veil of Mâyâ, that these objects are but illusory, and that the eternal and endless are but one. That it is not necessary to acquire all knowledge before true Wisdom may be gained; that it is not necessary to pervade the universe before the Self may be discriminated under the veil of illusion, and the step which leads from knowledge to Wisdom may be made at any point of the search, for the Self is hidden everywhere: "Nor is there aught, moving or unmoving, that may exist bereft of me."[1] Dimly the man senses the One beneath the many. Dimly he senses the Self under the veils that hide It from the eyes of men. Weary of a search that is endless, for objects had followed upon objects, weary of a Path that has no goal, for observation of phenomena is endless for the intellect, the man dimly at first, but still truly, knows that he must leave the objects, must leave observation, must leave the outer world, must turn inward and not outward, that he must look at the centre and not at the circumference of the circle. Nowhere on the surface, though he search the universe, shall he find the Self; everywhere, if he look inwards, shall the Self be manifest. Then there awakens in that man, slowly and gradually asserting itself, making itself felt in all this turmoil of phenomena, what is called Viveka,

[1] *Bhagavad Gîtâ*, x. 39.

discrimination—the discrimination of the Eternal amid the transient, of the Self within the objects, of the One concealed in the many, of the true end of all seeking, the Infinite, the Eternal Sat. He begins to discriminate between the show and the substance, between the illusory and the real, between the false and the truth that underlies it. This quality of discrimination is the first step out of mere knowledge into true Wisdom. The man discriminates the Eternal from the transitory, and his foot is placed on the higher stage of the Path. The result of the growth of the quality of discrimination within him is the feeling of Vairâgya, the disgust of the outer appearances—a feeling of shrinking away from them, a desire to fly from them, a longing to escape from them anywhere out of the sight of man, into silence, into solitude, away from the family life into the silence at least of Nature. But even there phenomena are to be sensed, and the Self is still hidden under illusion. He has been tricked by this beautiful show; like a foolish child he has been deluded into thinking that the toy he plays with is a living thing, that the doll has life and can answer back to his speech, can experience as he experiences. He is almost angry with the outer world, that had held him bound in threads that seemed links of iron, but in reality are mere webs of gossamer, made of glamour and unreality.

Out of that disgust which follows on the glimpses given by true discrimination, he is lifted by the knowledge that progress is possible for him, and that there are six mental attributes which he must acquire, to some extent at least, ere he can find the Self amidst its hidden coverings, ere he can truly recognise the Self beneath the veils that enshroud it. The worst enemy of man is himself, in the lowest nature that answers to the physical and astral worlds. The man must learn dispassion by the study of experiences, by disillusionment, until he has developed certain powers, without which the later stages of the Path may not be trodden, although they may be talked about and discussed by the intellect alone. He must acquire control of the mind, control of the body, so that neither body not mind may have the slightest power to disturb him and so that they will never move merely in answer to impulses from without. He must develop that wide breadth of view which understands and tolerates all, which realises the one aim under the many methods, which can see the same object being sought by a great diversity of ways. He must develop that endurance without which search for the Self will fail—that endurance which makes the soul strong. No soul that is weak can find the Self by the way of Wisdom. He must develop confidence in his own divinity

he must feel himself divine and know that therefore everything is possible to him, and he must develop that balance which nothing can disturb. For how shall the Self become visible if there be want of balance, preventing clearness and distinctness of vision?

When he has developed all these qualities, then it is said that he is ready to enter on the Path that leads to liberation, ready to stand as a candidate before the gate which opening shall give to his tread the Path of pure Wisdom for which he has trained himself by all the past experiences, by the purity of his developed intellect, the keenness of his developed mind, by the reason that he has sharpened in his struggle, and by the acquiring of all those other qualities with which he has crowned his intellectual life;—and then, and not till then, he is said to be an Adhîkârî, the man who is ready for the final teaching, the Wisdom concerning the Self.

What is that Wisdom? That Wisdom is the immediate knowledge of the Self—the knowledge of the One, the Infinite, the Eternal, the seeing of That everywhere, through every veil recognising It, and identifying the one Self wherever It appears, and It is everywhere. Wisdom is defined by Shrî Krishna Himself who has traced the Path of Wisdom as well as the Path of Action and the

Path of Devotion and has summed up into a single sentence the true Wisdom, that which is meant by the word Jñâna. He declared: "I, O Gudâkesha, am the Self seated in the heart of all beings; I am the beginning, the middle, and also the end of all beings."[1] And then later he declared in detail what was Wisdom: "Humility, unpretentiousness, harmlessness, forgiveness, rectitude, service of the teacher, purity, steadfastness, self-control, indifference to the objects of the senses, and also absence of egoism, insight into the pain and evil of birth, death, old age and sickness, unattachment, absence of self-identification with son, wife or home, and constant balance of mind in wished-for and unwished-for events, unflinching devotion to Me, without union with another, resort to sequestered places, absence of enjoyment in the company of men, constancy in the Adhyâtma wisdom, understanding of the object of essential wisdom; that is declared to be Wisdom; all against it is ignorance. That the Light of all light is said to be beyond darkness; Wisdom, the object of Wisdom the end of Wisdom, seated in the hearts of all."[2] That is Wisdom as declared by the lips of the Lord of Wisdom; and when He was speaking of the man, constant and unceasing in his pursuit of that

[1] *Bhagavad Gîtâ*, x. 20.

[2] *Bhagavad Gîtâ*, xiii. 7–11, 17.

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Wisdom, He spake of the Adhîkârî, and defined Wisdom as the knowledge of the essential Nature of Brahman.[1] Nothing less than that is Wisdom. Everything except that is ignorance. Knowledge is ignorance, if it knows only the outer effects. Science is ignorance if it is concerned only with the Mâyâ of phenomena. Wisdom resides alone in the knowledge of the Self in His essential Nature, His all-pervading identity.

Let us follow, however poorly, some of the alphabets of this knowledge of the Self which is Wisdom. The Self is One. Variety is of the outer universe, the play of illusions, the veil of Mâyâ, which blinds us to the Unity which is the only Existence, the only Life, the only Lord of the whole universe, beyond whom there is nothing; and He is One. The Self is actionless. Activity is of Prakriti, the veil with which the Self surrounds Himself, the play of guṇas. The variety and activity in Nature are the outer semblances—the visible appearances of that Unity. The change of one thing into another—birth, maturity, and death, the wheel of constant change of living objects, these are the play of the guṇas, and the guṇas revolve, whilst the Self remains unchanged. All this is the Lord surrounded by his Mâyâ, Vishnu with His Lila, the play of the universe; all is the thought of that

[1] Compare *Bhagavad Gîtâ*, viii. 3.

Supreme. The forms are changing and therefore illusory; the life is Himself, and He is all. It is said that "He who seeth that Prakriti verily performeth all actions, and that the Self is actionless, he seeth."[1] This is the working out of discrimination, the clear vision between the Self and all those veils of Nature which enshroud and hide Him. The Self is actionless; His apparent movements belong to external Nature. The Self is everywhere, seated in all, beyond all. Once more the words of Wisdom come forth: "Seeing indeed everywhere the same Ishvara equally dwelling."[2]

How hard the lesson to learn! Equally dwelling everywhere, in the lowest and the vilest as well as in the loftiest and the greatest, in the atom of the dust as well as in the central sun of the universe, in all that is vile and base, the Self of the profligate the same as the Self of the saint! What lesson is this that the Lord is teaching? What meaning in words like these? It means that Íshvara is the same in all, for all the universe is His own manifestation; and doth He not say: "I am the gambling of the cheat, and the splendid things, I!"[3] Can you catch glimpses of that lesson? Can you understand what that means for the universe? It implies that there is need of every experience, in

[1] *Bhagavad Gîtâ*, xiii. 29.
[2] *Bhagavad Gîtâ*, 28.
[3] *Bhagavad Gîtâ*, x. 36.

order that Wisdom may be perfected. If you can see the one Self in the beautiful, the noble, and the sublime, can you also see Him in the lowly, the ignoble, and the repulsive? To a man who can thus see, there is nothing ugly and nothing beautiful —all are parts of Himself, necessary for the present evolution. Everything has its own place, everything its own position, playing its own part and gathering experience; for He is infinite, and endless must be the variety that shall show forth, even a fragment of Himself. You see the differences, and therefore you see imperfection; you see a fragment and not the whole of which it is a part. It is as if you took a weaver's carpet, and saw the reverse side where the threads end, and saw not the pattern; nor do you see the upper side, where black is wanted as well as the exquisite shades of lovely glow, all falling into their rightful places. That one Self is in every one, and not one is outside His life. No fragment is excluded from the whole. Our purblind eyes see only the imperfection, they see not the Self working towards perfection; the whole is evolving to a perfect Nature, and the most hideous is on the way to divine beauty, the most simple is on the way to divine intelligence. Therefore see Him everywhere, seated equally in all, and then you will have true discrimination, and the Self shall shine forth undimmed.

Another lesson has still to be learned: all that exists and attracts, everything that has in it something of the element of attraction, has it only because of the Self. Were it possible that the Self should not be there, all attractiveness would vanish. Do you remember how Maitreyî prayed her husband to teach her the lesson of immortality, and he answered: "Behold, not indeed for the husband's sake, the husband is dear, but for the sake of the Self is dear the husband. Behold, not indeed for the wife's sake the wife is dear, but for the sake of the Self is dear the wife. Behold, not for the sons' sake the sons are dear, but for the sake of the Self are dear the sons. Behold, not for the property's sake property is dear, but for the sake of the Self is dear the property." Nay, not even "for the Gods' sake the Gods are dear, but for the sake of the Self are dear the Gods."[1] Thus the mighty Sage explained to his listening wife the mystery of the Self, and the mystery of the love that goes out from each to the other separated being. This love is the Self seeking Himself in another. So the Sage gave many another illustration, teaching how everything is dear for the Self within it and not for the veil of illusion that surrounds it. "The Self is verily to be seen, to be heard, to be meditated upon." That is the secret

[1] *Brihadâranyakopanishad*, IV. v. 6.

of immortality. Such was the teaching of the Sage to the wife he loved; such the words of the teacher speaking to the listening soul of the disciple, and unveiling the secret of Wisdom. When this lesson is learned, "Thou art That." When this lesson is acquired, "I am He"; there is no difference. That is the position of the true Jñânî of the liberated soul who cannot any longer be affected by the play of the guṇas, by the revolving wheel of Nature from which he has escaped. There is One, there is none other. That lesson, really learned, is the breaking of every bond, the liberation of the soul. In such a man all desires are dead, the activities of the mind are at rest. He doeth nothing, because the Self doeth all through him. There is the secret of "action in inaction," there is the secret of true Wisdom. He may act with the body, with the mind, but *he* is doing nothing.

How then does he live? Ere saying another word about that, let me remind you of a striking story that you may distinguish between the true wisdom and the lip wisdom. It is told in one of the sacred books, the story of Shrî Krishna and the Gopis, in relation to the Great Rishi Durvâsâ. For some time that Rishi ate but once in the year, and then required for his single meal an enormous amount of food. The Gopis were wont to carry him this yearly repast. When the time came to

carry the food, they gathered much rich food and piled it on many a platter, and a number of them started, heavily laden, with these delicate dishes. They came near his âshrama, and a river rolled broad between them and the abode of the saint, and they could not cross over the tossing waters; they feared the anger of Durvâsâ, and they went back to their Lord, and said: "What shall we do? There is the stream which we cannot cross, and if the Rishi's wrath burst forth, the worlds will be burned up." The Lord smiled, and said: "Go to the river, and speak to it in My name, and say to that river: 'If Krishna be a Brahmachari, roll back and let us pass.'" And they said: "What is this that we are to say? Krishna surrounded with his Gopis, and still a celibate?" But knowing that the Lord was wise, they going to the river spake those words of power, and the waters heard their voice, and rolled to either side, making liquid walls, and the Gopis trod on dry ground and reached the abode of the saint and carried the food to him. He emptied platter after platter, and finished the food. When the time came for the Gopis to go back, the river again was running high, and once more they said: "How shall we cross the river?" And they went to the Sage for help, and the Sage said: "Go to the river, and say, 'If Durvâsâ be but an eater of

air, then roll back and let us pass.'" The Gopis said to themselves: "Behold, he has eaten all this food, and nothing is left, and we are to say that he lives upon air!" But there was nothing else to do, and going to the river they spake again the words of power: "If Durvâsâ be an eater of air only, then roll back and let us pass." And again the waters heard the words and rolled back and made a path for their feet to tread. Then they related to the Lord the facts, and asked him to explain. And He taught them the lesson that the man of perfect Wisdom is unaffected by action, unchanged by all that surrounds him. The true Jñânî is unaffected by action; he cannot be touched by the phenomena of the outer world.

But here a mistake often comes in. Men who are only wise by lips but not in reality, who repeat phrases but have not developed the true life of the Self, who say "I am Brahman" but are affected by every thing, who are not disciplined and dispassionate, who seek the gratification of the senses, and then say, "It is only the body that seeks it, I am unaffected"; those men are deluded, and unconsciously, or even consciously, hypocritical; for they know not that the true Jñânî uses the guṇas, but is not used by them; he uses them to carry out the purpose of the universe, but is not swayed by them, and never can be affected by

them. The man who cannot resist the temptations of the body, and who then says "It is only the body that acts, I am Brahman," such a one is but a man of lip-phrases, and possesses not the real Wisdom, and is affected and degraded by his vice. The Wise man can take up any activity, can use it for the purpose of the Lord, and is but a channel for the maintenance of the world. He is moved from within and not from without. As a master he moves to his toils, and not as the slave is driven to his labour. He is free, and not a bondsman. To tread the Path—in words, being mastered by the body, whilst speaking the words of Wisdom, is to fall a prey to delusion, and to delay the progress of the soul. To that base end the labours of the great teachers have been turned, and the Vedânta has been used as an excuse for vile living; the pretence of dispassion has been set up where the reality is not. It was to avoid this danger that in the old days none might learn those lessons save he who had the qualifications. He whose desires were dead, whose passions were conquered, who had experienced disgust of the world, that man only was the fitted pupil, and to him only the guru taught the mysteries.

Such, then, is the Path of Wisdom, and such are some of the difficulties of its treading. So may man escape from the world and pass into a life of freedom.

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It may be well for you, however, to remember that if this escape be sought for the separated Self and not for the service of the universe, then, though the liberation may last for countless ages, the man will have ultimately to return in order to gain the uttermost perfection. For it is written in the sacred Upanishad that not by knowledge alone the Self is found, but by knowledge wedded to devotion.[1] Liberation may be gained by pure wisdom, and the soul passes into and abides in Janarloka, freed from birth and deaths; but that perfect life, which asks for nothing, which is content to be in bondage while the Lord is manifest, while Íshvara is working, that means the blending of Wisdom with Devotion, and thereby only is perfection gained.

[1] *Mundakopanishad*, iii. ii. 4.

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"THEY who with Manas fixed on Me, ever harmonised worship Me, with faith supreme endowed, these, in My opinion," said Shrî Krishna, "are best in Yoga." And then He went on to say that "The difficulty of those whose minds are set on the Unmanifested is greater; for the Path of the Unmanifested is hard for the embodied to reach. Those verily who, renouncing actions in Me, and intent on Me, worship meditating on Me, with whole-hearted Yoga, these I speedily lift up from the ocean of death and existence, O Partha, their minds being fixed on Me."[1] Those are the words in which the great Lord of Yoga instructed His beloved disciple. The fixing of mind on Íshvara, the revealed Lord, the worship intent ever upon Him, the constant meditation fixed upon the one object, those who thus act, He said, are speedily raised up by Him from this ocean into which souls are dipped, life

[1] *Bhagavad Gîtâ*, xii. 2, 5–7.

after life, and from which, wearied as it were, they long to escape. This devotion, which he thus described, this fixing of the mind, this constant meditation, this earnest worship, these are summed up in the word Bhakti or Love; and it is the Path of Love, the Bhakti Mârga. It is that which we are to study at this our concluding meeting.

There is one wide difference between the Path of Wisdom and the Path of Love, which stands out before our eyes clear and distinct from beginning to end; and this difference is in what we may call the object of the devotee and the object of the Jñânî; these are distinct, the one from the other, in a sense—although of course, fundamentally and essentially, they are one and the same. The distinction is alluded to in the shloka that I have quoted, as to the difficulty of treading and reaching the Path of the Unmanifested. He who treads the Path of Wisdom, the Jñâna, seeks the Self, the One existence, the Infinite, the Eternal, and the Unmanifested, underlying and pervading all, supporting all, and hidden beneath all. But as we saw in our study yesterday, it is by discrimination, by Wisdom, that he reaches this knowledge of the Self, and its supreme expression is the "So'ham"—"I am He"—the perfect identity with the One without a second. But when we look at the object to which the Bhakta directs his attention, his love,

his worship, his undeviating faith, we find that this object is the supreme Íshvara, the embodied Lord, the manifested God, the one Lord making Himself manifested in form, and so becoming a concrete object of love and adoration. In fact, where Bhakti is to be aroused, it must be directed towards a Being who shows what, in the widest sense of the term, may be said to be the limits of individuality. However much we may extend our conception of individuality, casting aside all by which it is limited when we are dealing with an individual who is human, it ends after all in the very fundamental idea of limitation; the Lord of the Universe, Íshvara, the Supreme, has imposed a self-limitation for the purpose of manifestation, in order that the universe may be; and this Lord of the Universe is the object towards which the aspirations, the love, the worship of all beings in the universe may be directed.

We find still further that this Supreme Íshvara who would be called, in the western term, the "Personal God"—although the word "personal" brings in an element that we must necessarily exclude in our thought—this Supreme Íshvara still further manifests Himself from time to time, by way of Avatâras, in order to give man, as it were, a still more concrete embodiment, to which his love may turn and his adoration may be addressed, a still

more clear individuality which may awaken his heart, which may attract his emotion, towards whom worship may be directed, and to whom homage may be paid. We find in the Hindu faith, and in other faiths as well, that the Supreme manifests Himself not only as the Lord of the Universe, but also in the form of man, and that in that human form He specially arouses devotion, worship, love; presenting all the attractiveness which pleases the human heart, all the beauty which captivates the human imagination. In condescension to the weakness of His creatures, in compassion for the feebleness of their thought, He comes, as it were, within the reach of their limited intelligence, within the reach of their half-blind love, and presents Himself as an Avatâra, manifesting in human form some of the perfections of the Supreme.

In studying human faiths, in studying the religions of the world, we find that this is well-nigh universal, and that a divine-human Form occupies the central altar of worship; and although beyond Him the Higher is recognised, nay, although even beyond Íshvara Himself, the one without a second is dimly seen, the human heart clings to the Feet of the manifested Lord, and the human emotions find their rest and their home in Him. Whether it be under the sacred name of Râmachandra, Shrî Krishna, or whether it be under the name of Christ

or the name of the Buddha, you will find that humanity specially craves to worship a Being, and seeks in devotional emotion that satisfaction which no abstract conception of infinity can afford. To those who tread the Path of Bhakti this object of worship must be the goal of the Path. For how can man, in the fullest sense of the word, feel the ecstasy of love towards the conception of a boundless Existence, of limitless space, and how, without those limitations that make an object "real" to us, shall the human heart be able to find its rest in God?

So it is, then, that along this Path of Love we always find the Bhakta seeking for his Lord. What is this love that inspires him? What is this devotion that animates him? What is this which so fully penetrates his being, and thrills through every fibre of his life, that to him there seems to be nothing true beyond the one beloved Presence, and everything else becomes dim in the light of the all-supreme Lord? He who is the very embodiment of devotion, that mighty Sage and Bhakta Nârada, has left to us teachings on Love, and therein he has described its nature, has given to us the marks, as it were, by which it may be recognised, has told us what to seek and what to find, if we would cultivate the quality of devotion.

Nârada begins by saying that the nature of

BHAKTI MÂRGA

Bhakti is "extreme devotion to some one";[1] the element of devotion to an individual is of its very nature. Later on in the same Sutra he gives a number of definitions of this Love, giving his own last, full of that devotion which is his main, his most striking characteristic. Definitions of Love are given according to the opinion of Vyâsa, Gârga, and Sândilya; and then Nârada says: "It is surrendering all actions to God, and feeling the greatest misery in forgetting God."[2] There speaks out the spirit of the true Bhakta—all the life surrendered to the object of devotion, the worst misery the forgetting Him. If the heart be blinded by the veil of some other object, if some cloud arises between the soul and its Lord, and even for a moment it forgets its God, then the bitterest agony is its portion, its greatest misery—the forgetting its Lord. Thus has Nârada taught, and this is known to the heart of every one who is blessed with a striving after devotion. Then he describes the man who has obtained this love: "Obtaining which man becomes perfect, becomes immortal, becomes satisfied; and obtaining which he desires nothing, grieves not, hates not, does not delight (in sensuous objects), makes no effort (for selfish ends); knowing which he becomes intoxicated

[1] *Nârada Sutra*, translated by E. T. Sturdy, p. 19.

[2] *Nârada Sutra*, p. 28.

(with joy), transfixed and rejoices in the Self." Further, "It cannot be made to fulfil desires, for its nature is renunciation."[1]

That then is Bhakti, as drawn by one who is the very embodiment of it. How should such devotion be attained? Of what steps is the Bhakti Mârga composed? How shall men whose hearts are filled with lower loves find the Love that is supreme? How shall men whose minds run out after the objects of sense know the One, whom knowing all is known? How shall man, wrapped round with illusion, entangled with baser affections, his feet clinging to the mire of earth, how shall he attain to the love of Nârada? How shall he become the perfected Bhakta, the devotee without flaw or stain?

We must trace the early steps of this Path, as we traced the earlier steps of the others. It is almost useless to give the perfect picture, and not to trace the course of its development from the imperfect, so that one may strive from imperfection to reach perfection. We may be fascinated by the beauty of the perfection of devotion, dazzled by the splendour of a love without a flaw. But we want to learn how such love may grow in us, with what fuel to feed the fire of devotion that we may become its very flame and naught else.

[1] *Nârada Sutra*, pp. 22, 24.

Human love may serve to give us at first a faint reflexion of love for the Divine. By looking on that we may learn some signs which would characterise the real Bhakta. The object would be changed, but the essential would remain the same. Think for a moment of the strongest, purest, noblest, intensest love that you have ever felt for a human being. Analyse your life deeply, and see how it was affected by that love. See how all other things become less attractive under its light. Perhaps you cared for wealth, perhaps you were devoted to literature, or perhaps you were eager in your desire for knowledge. But there shone on the horizon of your life a face which attracted you with the intensest love of your nature, which drew you in spite of yourself towards it. All the attitude of your mind was suddenly changed under the glory and the beauty of this presence. Wealth seemed to be worthless as compared with the treasure of his love. Literature seemed to be dull and wearisome as compared with the delight of conversation with him. All knowledge seemed as a withered leaf compared with the ecstasy of his embrace. Your highest delight was to be near him; your innermost being was suffused with the love of him. All other attractions weakened their power over you; all other colours grew faint beside the radiance of

this bright hue. He was to you not only a friend, but teacher, guide, lover, summing up in himself many of the noblest qualities possible in man. How love for him transformed all your life! Everything took new colours in the light poured out by him. Imagine such a human love raised to the loftiest heaven; such a human love grown deeper than the profoundest ocean; imagine it enhanced by the perfection of the object of love, intensified by everything being contained in that object; imagine that no weariness can come to it, no satiety be found in it, and you will have some faint reflection of the feeling with which the true Bhakta regards the object of his love and worship.

Swâmi Vivekânanda, speaking in America, told a somewhat graphic story in order to impress upon his hearers how very little, as a rule, people really longed after God. He told of a young man who came to a religious teacher and said that he wanted to find God. The Sage smiled and said nothing. The young man returned time after time, ever repeating the intensity of his desire, his longing to find God. After many days the Sage told him to accompany him as he went to the river to take his morning bath; and when both were in the river, the Sage took hold of the young man and plunged him under the surface of the water and held him there. The young man struggled

and struggled to shake off his hold. Finally he raised him out of the water, and said to him: "My son, what did you long for most when under the water?" "A breath of air," gasped the youth. "Thus must the would-be disciple long after God if he would find Him. If you have this longing after God, verily He shall be found of you."

But how many have such a longing? How many really want to find God? The first thing that comes across men makes them forget the One, and the longing vanishes from their heart. Instead of struggling for breath, the true Bhakta would have thought only of God, that he would be nearer to his goal by death under the river-stream. We want everything that comes in our way; we want wealth, honour, worldly enjoyments and possessions. How can this greedy heart of ours find room for God? As is said in the Christian story—there was no room for Christ in the inn, and our hearts are as inns which are filled with the passing travellers and have no room for the Divine Guest.

None the less shall we not be without hope; and we shall see whether there is not an entrance to this Path possible. Here a great Sage has helped us—one of those great ancient Indian writers who have devoted themselves to the teaching of the higher spiritual truths—the Sage Râmânuja. He has dealt with the preliminary stages by which

man develops devotion, by which he may gradually prepare himself to be a receptacle of real love.

That Sage in tracing out these preliminary steps begins at the very beginning, with the man in his body as he is living here. He first concerns himself with a man's body,—how should he treat this body? how should he behave towards it? What are the necessary qualifications for the body of a man who desires the development of the characteristics of spiritual love? The first thing he speaks about is Viveka: not in the sense we used yesterday, but in a very much more elementary sense. He applies it to the discrimination of food. The man who desires that his body shall be the vehicle in which the soul penetrated by divine love shall dwell must have a body that is pure, and must use discrimination with regard to food. He begins with that elementary point, and says that the Bhakta must be careful in the selection of his food. He must not take that which would require suffering on the part of other sentient beings before he can enjoy it. The would-be Bhakta must not be a source of suffering and misery to others, a source of injury to creatures who are lower than himself in the scale of evolution. He must not use as food anything that possesses sentient life, as do all animal creatures. No Bhakta must touch such food. He not only pollutes the body by such food, but

he degrades his soul by showing hatred instead of compassion, selfishness instead of altruism, doing injury to helpless animals instead of protecting them, doing away with the beautiful life of a harmless creature for the selfish gratification of his own palate — this is trampling on the very idea of love. Therefore, at the outset, he must learn Viveka or discrimination of food. In the selection of the food that is necessary for a Bhakta, the magnetic law of purity must be followed,— purity which affects the subtler bodies of man, which are liable to be polluted by outside contacts, and which should be kept clean from external pollution as well as from pollution from within. So also cleanliness should be followed that the body may in every respect be a worthy temple of the devotee who has to use it while he treads the Path of Love. He then passes on to give the great axiom, "Pure food, pure mind, and constant memory of God." That is to be the law of life for the would-be Bhakta—not for him who has already attained devotion, but for one who desires to attain it.

These are the preliminary steps for finding God —for him who would arouse this divine quality of Love. The Acharya then says that the would-be Bhakta must practise freedom from desire,—his only desire must be fixed on God, his only longing

must be directed to God, there must be no room for any other desire in his heart. This desire must spread out and encompass every fraction of his being, and every other desire must be driven out to make room for the one supreme attachment. Then he must practise turning his thoughts to God. This is to be a constant thing. As he tries this concentration, he will find that his mind will wander away, will go after other objects; it will wander away from the one supreme object, and seek other things upon which to rest. But has not the Lord of Yoga said, in answer to the complaint of Arjuna, that the mind was restless as the wind and as difficult to subdue,—has not He answered: "It may be curbed by constant practice."[1] The would-be devotee, therefore, should practise constantly to turn his mind to God. He will bring it back to the object of contemplation when it goes to other things. He will have stated times during which he will be engaged in worship, with his mind directed exclusively to the contemplation of the One.

These are only the first steps. He worships at stated times in order that presently he may worship always; he practises meditation now and again in order that presently there may be no intervals; but meditation may be ever going on, unbroken, continuous, and complete. He is only

[1] *Bhagavad Gîtâ*, vi. 35.

learning, so he has fixed times for worship and contemplation. He fixes his heart on the Supreme. That is not enough. That practice may lead into a life wanting in the characteristics of true Bhakti. He may find delight in his meditation, joy from contemplation, and thus may become forgetful of others and may worship for the pleasure of worshipping. But the true Bhakta does not seek to gain; he seeks to give, to give constantly, perpetually, in order that he may overcome the selfishness of human nature and eradicate the grasping tendency of the mind. Therefore the next step which is laid down is that he must do good to others. Not in contemplation is he to find his only employment; his love must flow out towards his fellowman, and his life must be one of constant service, continual assistance, to all who are in need. He will never eradicate the grasping element unless he cultivates the giving spirit; unless he is always stripping himself in order that others may enjoy. Give, give, give, continually, for giving is of the very nature of love. Love asks for nothing save the right to give; love asks for nothing save the right to spend; love asks for no return, no gratitude. It asks for no enjoyment for itself. It asks only to be allowed to love, to spread itself out in every direction and make all happy in the embrace of the lover. As our hearts are hard and selfish, even in religion

itself we have the subtlest forms of selfishness, we ruin the pure gold with the dross; therefore it is that religion, the noblest and purest of all things, sometimes becomes degraded and defiled, because men bring their selfishness into the sanctuary and convert that sacred place to a market where buying and selling goes on—so much worship for so much joy. Where there is no free giving there is no place for God.

Therefore active doing of good to others is part of the training of the devotee. How few really love, as far as their fellowmen are concerned. We are always asking for something back, some gratification of the lower self, and we always crave and crave that something shall come from our beloved to us. That is not love, but calculation. It is a subtler form of selfishness. Pure human love pours itself out freely. It is enough to be permitted to love. The true lover does not ask more than to give his love.

Such training will more and more prepare the man to feel the true Bhakti—the love of God. Then it is said we must gain purity and truth and rectitude and charity and the absence of injury to others and compassion. All these things are laid down as necessary on the Path, if ever we are to attain Bhakti, if ever we are to know the love that is divine. See how many of these steps we are

prepared to take. See these qualities wanted as preliminary steps, and then let us examine our own hearts and see where they are lacking; in beginning to supply the lack we shall be beginning to tread the Bhakti Mârga.

The company of good men is another thing that is advised. Those who are more advanced than ourselves, those who spend some of their time in conversing on subjects of a spiritual nature or who sit together in silence meditating on the object of devotion, are the persons whose company should be sought, rather than the company of the worldly and the frivolous. Try to be with such. Man is influenced by the company into which he goes. The thoughts of other men play upon him. And he will largely have his mind coloured by the atmosphere into which he goes. If he consorts always with the careless and the frivolous and walks with the foolish, how shall such a man be able to gather himself in and concentrate on the Self? How shall he find his Lord? Rather let him seek a quiet life, never forgetting duty, but never seeking activity for the mere sake of distraction. Let him seek the company of the holy, and catch from them a reflection of their nobler thought and purer aspiration; for the companionship of those who love the Lord is stimulating to those who are beginning the Path.

Good books should also be read, books that stimulate devotion and set before us the noble examples of the saints and the sages of the world. Do not fritter away your time in worthless literature; do not fall into the habit of frivolous reading. You have no time to waste. When you read, read what helps you in the object of your search. If you desire to succeed in law, you will not read stories, but you will read books of jurisprudence, the history of the law of different countries; you will study their customs and eschew everything that will not help you in your search for success. Do not do less for the love of God. When will men work for God as they work for reputation? When will they seek His face with the same ardour as they seek the toys and frivolities of earth? Teachers are not wanting; the steps are not hidden. It is the heart that is wanting, the love that is lacking, the desire which is absent. These are the things that keep us back, and not our ignorance of the way. So Nârada also taught to avoid mischievous books and vain discussions, and to ponder over the Scriptures and devotional works.

Then, step by step, following these stages, treading this earlier portion, there comes a time when Ishvara, diligently sought, reverently worshipped, persistently followed, though yet He was not seen,

reveals Himself to his worshipper, and the Supreme is seen. Then there comes a change over the life; then a new element enters into the heart; there sweeps over the man a wave of emotion, and he is never again the same as he was before. When the Supreme has been seen, though only a glimpse of His beauty be caught, though only one gleam of that glory has come down and touched the heart of the devotee, the inner man is changed; the whole heart is revolutionised; the back is turned upon the externalities of the earth, and without effort the face is turned to God. Remember that most significant and suggestive phrase found in the Scripture of Devotion, the *Bhagavad Gîtâ*, where it is said, in talking of these stages, that the objects of senses turn aside from the abstemious dweller in the body; but the flavour itself, the desire for them, the wish for them, the slightest inclination for them, turneth away when once the Supreme is seen.[1]

Then, indeed, the Path begins to shine with heavenly radiance; the first touch of the blessedness of the bliss which is the Self thrills the whole nature. How long has the Bhakta been calling to his Lord? How long has his heart been calling out for a sight of his Lord? How he has said over and over again: "How may I know Thee,

[1] *Bhagavad Gîtâ*, ii. 59.

O Yogi, by ceaseless meditation? In what, in what aspect art Thou to be thought of by me, O blessed Lord?"[1] When the Lord reveals himself to the soul of His servant, in the radiance of that sunlight all other objects fade away—in the glory of that sight supreme, the vision of the Lord. The earth is never again the same when once that light has shone. Again clouds may arise, mistakes and feebleness may hinder the disciple's Path; but he has seen, he knows, and he remembers, and has an ever-present memory to support him through every endeavour. Then it is that it is said by the Lord that such a man, "having cast aside egoism, violence, arrogance, desire, wrath, covetousness, selfless and peaceful, he is fit to become Brahman."[2] He is becoming fit for the constant vision of the Lord. Selfless and serene he becomes the mirror of the Supreme soul, and becoming Brahman, merged in Brahman, being the same to all creatures, he enters into the Lord. Such is the word of Shrî Krishna; such the promise of the Supreme.

He who has thus trained himself, who has purified his lower nature, who has become unswerving in devotion, who is serene and passionless, who does wrong to no one, who embraces all

[1] *Bhagavad Gîtâ*, x. 17.

[2] *Bhagavad Gîtâ*, xviii. 53.

beings in the perfect love of his nature, and who shuts none out from the limits of his compassion, who feels towards every creature as a mother feels for her first-born son — such a man has become fit for the presence of his Lord. He passes to the Supreme above. He is ready for the everlasting peace. For he who is love is God; he whose whole being is love is the image of the Supreme; in himself he reproduces the divinity, for Love is God and God is Love. What can keep him then apart from that which is himself? What barrier can arise between the soul and its Lord? That soul is filled with the love of the Lord; itself is love unbounded; and as a river joining with other rivers rushes into the ocean, so does that soul that is love fly into the ocean of love, the Supreme. The waters of the river mingle with the ocean, and become one in nature, one in quality. Who shall keep them separate? Who shall divide the soul from God? The soul knows its Lord; it bows before Him in worship, and wrapped up in the Supreme it becomes one for ever with the Lord who is Itself. And then the Lord says no longer, he shall come to Me, or he shall find Me, or he shall tread the Path to My supreme abode, but He says: He verily is Myself.[1] He is Myself. That is the end of the Path, that the inevitable

[1] *Bhagavad Gîtâ*, vii. 18.

outcome of love. Love is God, and the more it is perfect the more the divine becomes manifest in it. Even in human love we see how it breaks down walls; how, as we love each other, we forget "I and mine" and become one. Even in our poor human love, the lover feels one with the beloved, and no longer separate. Have you not felt that all that is yours is his, and you know no difference between yourself and him? So it is with the soul and its Lord; separated for the purposes of worship and adoration, intended to draw out the soul and all its powers, the perfected soul becomes one with its Lord—one for service, one for help, one for saving the world as He saves it, one to help the world as He helps it. In this communion between the lover and the beloved there is such utter merging and identification that all that is done by the one is done by the other. The Bhakta becomes the Saviour of the world; he is very God; and all that God can do, he who is one with Him can also do in the creation and dissolution of the worlds.

What might not India be if she would give birth to some real Bhaktas, not those of the lips, but of the heart, of the life. If only one or two such men were found, whose hearts were so fired with divine love that nothing was left out of its

all-embracing scope, India would be saved, as it were, in a moment. Love would have its way. Remember you not that example of tried devotion, the boy Prahlâda? How nothing could injure him, no poison could kill, no fire could burn, no mountain could crush him, and this because he was perfectly devoted, he worshipped his Lord with all the strength of his heart, through every danger and difficulty. The perfect devotee can be harmed by none: no weapon can slay him, no water can drown him. He is one with the Spirit Immortal, and love is immortal life. Therefore, said Nârada, and I finish with him as I began with him: "Its nature is supreme devotion to some one; Love is immortal."

Oh! for such a man to help us! for such a man to teach us! We cannot yet become it. We cannot be the love that makes us God. But might we not by our love help others who are worthier? Might we not press on the progress of those who have advanced further? Remember that many a little stream joined together may form a mighty torrent. Let us bring our rills of love and adoration to the feet of the Supreme. Let us give our love however feeble, let us give our aspiration however halting, let us give our devotion however weak; let us place them at His feet who is love, who is pure good. Might it not be that

out of our many loves a great flame of love should arise that should help our land, that should purify our people? While the aspiration is here, the result is a possibility. Let it be ours to do something for that great work.

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